

# THE PECK PERSPECTIVE

(From the Capitol)

February 17, 2025

**Veto Override Coming:** On February 11<sup>th</sup>, our self-proclaimed “Middle of the Road” governor proved once again that she is not middle of the road or even moderate by vetoing SB 63, the Help Not Harm legislation. SB 63 protects children from the harmful and irreversible effects of puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and transgender surgery.

Some (including me) thought there was a strong possibility that since SB 63 passed with a bi-partisan supermajority vote of 32-8 in the Senate and 83-35 in the House, the bill might become law minus the governor’s signature – but we were wrong. The Senate will take up the veto override first, followed by the House.

**Proving the Need for COGE:** Last month, the Kansas Department of Labor released its monthly labor report for December which said in part, “*Seasonally adjusted job estimates for Kansas indicate total nonfarm payroll employment increased by 1,200 from November ..... Private sector jobs increased by 500 over the month, while government increased by 700.*” I see nothing positive by the growth of government (taxpayer funded) jobs – especially when the government job growth exceeds private sector job growth. These numbers highlight an urgent need for fiscal responsibility.

In full disclosure, when looking at all of 2024, private sector job growth was higher than government job growth, 13,300 to 5,100, and the government jobs include federal, state and local employees. But, for Kansas taxpayers to be saddled with funding 5,100 new government jobs is disturbing.

Fortunately for Kansas taxpayers the new Senate Committee on Government Efficiency (COGE) is hard at work finding ways to reduce the size and scope of state government. A bill they recently sent to the Senate floor, SB 99, will eliminate taxpayer money paying for full-time positions that have been vacant for 180 days (6 months) or longer. I have long been frustrated by the practice of providing taxpayer money to government agencies for employees they don’t have. It appears the money for salaries for unfilled positions is simply used as a slush fund for agency heads.

SB 99 is a simple, effective reform that will prevent unnecessary bureaucratic expansion by cutting waste without cutting essential services and redirect funds back to taxpayers. Passage of SB 99 will force the government to operate more efficiently, just like the private sector businesses.

**Safely Passing Stopped Vehicles (SB 8):** It's a good idea for drivers of vehicles to slow down and move as far to the left as is safely possible when approaching a stalled or stopped vehicle. Passage of SB 8 would change that from a good idea to a requirement. In SB 8, a driver approaching a stopped vehicle displaying hazard warning signal lamps, road flares, or caution signals must proceed with caution and change lanes away from the stopped vehicle. If it is not safe or possible to change lanes, the driver must proceed with due caution and reduce their speed. SB 8 passed the Senate 39-0.

**More Money for Conservation Districts (SB 36):** Current statute provides Conservation Districts (District) in Kansas with a dollar-for-dollar match from the State, capped at \$25,000 per county (all 105 counties have a District). The \$25,000 cap has not changed since 2007. SB 36 would increase the cap to \$50,000 and change the match to \$2 of state money for every \$1 provided by the County beginning in FY 2026, subject to appropriation. A District primarily provides a benefit for those in production agriculture, but any county resident can receive assistance from a District. SB 36 passed 39-0.

**Putting a Limit on Government Spending (SB 181):** During my tenure as a legislator, I have consistently supported placing limits on the growth of state government spending. On several occasions I've co-sponsored legislation to accomplish those limitations, but sadly, the proposals have not gained sufficient traction. Hopefully in 2025 things are different.

The Senate Ways and Means Committee recently put its stamp of approval on SB 181, legislation that would, starting in FY 2027, limit the annual growth of state government expenditures to the previous year's spending as adjusted for the Consumer Price Index (inflation) plus population growth in Kansas. If there is a year when inflation and the population change is negative, the budget for the fiscal year would remain the same as in the preceding fiscal year.

Until next time, may the blessings of God be yours.

Virgil Peck  
State Senator